

NBC BRIEFING

22 January 1958

VENEZUELA

- I. A general strike which began in Caracas on 21 January seriously threatens the position of Venezuelan President Perez.**
 - A. Street rioting resulted in over 50 deaths, several hundred injured, about 1,000 arrests, and considerable property damage.**
 - 1. Troops were called up to reinforce police and national guards who apparently were unable to control the violence; some widespread, indiscriminate shooting in clashes between authorities and people.**
 - 2. The government imposed a curfew from 6:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. and has possibly decreed a state of siege.**
- II. An increasingly effective clandestine organization composed of various civilian elements in opposition to Perez (the "Junta Patriotica") appears to be the primary sponsor of the strike, but the leaders have not yet been determined.**
 - A. Press, radio, and TV workers, students, and some labor groups are backing the movement.**
 - B. The Junta Patriotica has reportedly contacted dissident military groups and oil workers to win their cooperation.**
 - C. Elements of varying size in all armed forces components are reportedly prepared to revolt if the strike appears to be successful.**
 - D. Shops and banks are closed; oil company employees not reporting for work.**

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III. Perez' present military supporters may decide to oust him, if the strike and violence continue, in order to conciliate the mounting opposition.

A. Perez moved decisively to realign his military support after the 1-2 January revolt and the cabinet shake-up of 10 January which was dictated by the armed forces.

- 1. But most of the former commanders who built the myth of invulnerable armed forces loyalty to Perez are in exile, under detention, or out of favor.**
- 2. And the rapid changes in top government and military commands have apparently confused all ranks of officers, many of whom are probably watching the power struggle within the divided military and the strength of the civilian opposition before committing their support.**
- 3. The prolonged use of brutal repressive methods, as apparently necessary for Perez to crush the growing opposition and to retain power, may further erode his military support.**